



AMERICAN PRESS EDITORIAL

Area overlooked in Census planning

Special plans are in the works for a more accurate census count in coastal areas devastated by hurricanes in recent years. The national effort is being spearheaded by Robert Groves, the new director of the U.S. Census Bureau who has longtime ties to Southeast Louisiana.

Groves, who grew up in Metairie, said federal policy that has been in place since 1790 requires that people be counted where they are living or staying. And he added the bureau will take historic steps this year to ensure a more accurate head count.

The Census Bureau will hand-deliver questionnaires across much of Southeast Louisiana, South Mississippi and Eastern Texas, Groves said. Those fact-finding documents are usually mailed to existing addresses.

Workers will deliver questionnaires to addresses that appear to be inhabitable even if they are not on the address roster compiled by census workers who did a recent canvass.

"We know that in this area, the addresses that don't exist in July 2009 may exist in April 2010, and we want to count those people, so we're doing extraordinary expensive work," Groves said. "We're worried about this address list. We want to get it right. ... We care about this region a great deal."

The extra effort will pay off for the affected areas because federal appropriations often hinge on the population.

Plans are to deliver forms to every household in Orleans, St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes. They will also be taken to parts of Jefferson, St. Tammany, St. John the Baptist and St. Charles parishes.

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin is taking a different approach. For some time now, he has asked Katrina victims who are living elsewhere to list New Orleans as their home if they want to return there.

"Well, excuse me," he said at a recent conference. "We had a little event called Hurricane Katrina, and if any community deserves a little consideration without breaking the rules it's the Gulf Coast since Hurricane Katrina."

Groves said no exceptions will be made to current policy, but his plan to hand-deliver questionnaires demonstrates he wants to get as accurate a count as possible in areas hit by hurricanes. And he had some advice for persons receiving those questionnaires.

"My wish is that you follow the instructions on the simple little form that has 10 questions and will take you 10 minutes," he said. "It's really important to get it right, that that money go where the people are."

We welcome the plans outlined by Groves, but would offer an important addition to his agenda. How about giving the residents of Southwest Louisiana the same special effort you are giving to Southeast Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

We have had more than our fair share of hurricanes in recent years and the rebuilding here continues.